United Nations A/54/154/Add.1 – E/1999/94/Add.1

General Assembly
Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
18 October 1999

Original: English

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session
Agenda item 20 (a)
Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Economic and Social Council
Substantive session of 1999
Geneva, 5-30 July 1999
Agenda item 5
Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance

Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

I. Introduction

1. The present addendum to the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations dated 15 June 1999 (A/54/154), provides updated information related to the safety and security of United Nations and humanitarian personnel and responds in part to General Assembly resolution 53/87 of 7 December 1998. The Secretary-General will produce for the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly a comprehensive report on the respect for the privileges and immunities of officials of the United Nations and the specialized agencies and related organizations, including the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, and protection of United Nations personnel and measures to be taken to improve it, taking into account the views of Governments, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the United Nations Security Coordinator and other relevant actors.

II. Security and safety of United Nations and humanitarian personnel

2. The security and safety of personnel of the United Nations continues to be a matter of paramount importance and concern to the Secretary-General and the executive heads of

99-30803 (E) 041199

United Nations agencies, programmes and funds. In many areas where United Nations personnel operate, killings, illegal arrests, detentions, harassment and theft of vehicles are daily occurrences for staff. Between 1 January and 15 October 1999, 12 staff members have given their lives in the service of the United Nations, while the fate of two other staff members in East Timor remains unknown. The 12 staff members lost their lives in Burundi, Colombia, East Timor, Iraq, Jamaica, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Uzbekistan. Eight were shot, one was stabbed and one lost his life as the result of a bomb explosion. In addition, 23 passengers and crew members working for or with the United Nations lost their lives when two United Nations aircraft crashed in Angola on 26 December 1998 and 2 January 1999. To date, no bodies have been retrieved from the sites, although, based on evidence of the wreckage, it is assumed that there were no survivors. While the cause of the crashes remains uncertain, the difficulties and delays encountered by the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM) to reach the sites were unacceptable in such critical situations. In particular, 1998 represented a severe deterioration in the security situation for humanitarian personnel. In the same year, 12 staff members of the World Food Programme lost their lives in the course of duty.

3. In addition to the above-mentioned dangers faced and sacrifices made by United Nations and humanitarian personnel, staff members have also been subjected to detention and arrest. After being held for some 11 months by armed elements in one of the republics of the Russian Federation, Vincent Cochtel, of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, was freed and returned to Geneva on 12 December 1998. On 4 August 1999, in Sierra Leone, a group of peacekeepers, United Nations military observers, aid workers and journalists were taken hostage by former rebels. After sustained international and national pressure all were released by 10 August 1999.

4. The killing of United Nations and humanitarian personnel and the kidnapping and detention risks faced by staff members in many countries are a reflection of the lack of respect accorded to those carrying out the neutral and impartial work of the United Nations. The previous assumption that the United Nations flag provided protection is no longer universally valid. Threats against United Nations personnel impede the freedom of humanitarian organizations to access vulnerable populations and the implementation of United Nations programmes. As a result the vulnerability of those populations is more likely to increase. A good example of the consequences of insecurity on United Nations programmes is Angola, where the continued lack of adequate security following several fatal incidents involving humanitarian personnel has restricted access to almost 70 per cent of the country and, therefore, to approximately three million members of the country's population, whose humanitarian situation cannot be assessed nor addressed.

5. The relocation of non-essential staff from East Timor during the widespread violence that followed the ballot there on 30 August 1999 was necessary after the threatening action taken by armed militia groups in surrounding the United Nations compound, and especially the severe threat to life faced by East Timorese working for the United Nations from armed groups. It is believed that similar militia groups were responsible for the murder of one United Nations staff member and the disappearance of two others. In the resulting situation, the United Nations was unable to carry out its work and had to be confined to its quarters. The same militias are believed also to have ransacked portions of the United Nations compound in Dili following the departure of United Nations personnel. The East Timor crisis reflected the growing need for the United Nations to extend additional protection to national United Nations staff members who are more vulnerable to pressures, threats and, indeed, attacks by armed elements in their own countries. The United Nations responded by relocating several national staff members and their families from East Timor.

III. Measures taken to improve the protection of United Nations and humanitarian personnel

6. Several steps have been taken by the United Nations to address the growing insecurity faced by its staff members in the field. These include the establishment of training mechanisms, resolutions by the General Assembly and the entry into force of international instruments. Sadly, these continue to fall short of providing the protection that was intended, owing mainly to a lack of respect by armed elements for United Nations personnel, but also because of a lack of resources.

7. The Trust Fund for Security of personnel of the United Nations system, established in accordance with the 26 March 1998 decision of the Administrative Committee for Coordination, *inter alia*, provides for funding of security and stress management training as well as stress counseling.

8. As of 21 September 1999, the Trust Fund has received contributions from the Governments of Japan, Monaco, Norway and Senegal. The Trust Fund has permitted a mobile training team from the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator to successfully train over 1,300 staff in security issues, an activity the necessity of which was reaffirmed by the General Assembly in its resolution 53/87. Training activities specifically target designated officials, security management teams and wardens. All staff members will be provided with personal security awareness training. In addition, a number of organizations, including the World Food Programme, have developed their own training to complement the training to be carried out by the United Nations Security Coordinator, which relates to the specific operational requirements of each organization. However, contributions made thus far to the Trust Fund can only cover the needs of staff at 14 duty stations, and an additional $5 million is required to train those staff at approximately 40 other duty stations where security is a major concern.

9. General Assembly resolution 53/87, which calls upon all Governments and parties in complex humanitarian emergencies to cooperate fully with the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies and organizations and to ensure the safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel, has not been fully respected. Often, Governments continue to be unable or unwilling to assume their responsibilities in this regard. With respect to other parties involved in conflicts, it has been equally if not more difficult to obtain an acceptance of their responsibilities with respect to humanitarian personnel.

10. The Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel of 1994, which entered into force on 15 January 1999, will be an important international instrument for use by United Nations and associated personnel in countries where there is a mission or presence mandated by the General Assembly or the Security Council.

IV. Recommendations

11. The Secretary-General will produce a comprehensive and thorough set of recommendations in his anticipated report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session (see para. 1 above). The present addendum will, therefore, restrict itself to two major recommendations that will have far-reaching protection benefits for humanitarian personnel serving in the field. They will address the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel and the status of the Trust Fund for Security of personnel of the United Nations system.

12. The Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel covers those United Nations and associated personnel authorized by the General Assembly or the Security Council. As the Secretary-General noted in his report to the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/1999/957), there is an emerging consensus that the scope of the Convention should be extended to cover other categories of United Nations and associated personnel not at present covered under the Convention, including locally recruited staff. States should also consider adopting appropriate national legislation on the matter.

13. It is therefore hoped that Member States which have not yet done so will ratify the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. It is also recommended that the General Assembly urgently pursue the development of a protocol to the Convention which would extend the scope of legal protection to all United Nations and associated personnel.

14. The Trust Fund for Security of personnel of the United Nations system is an effective mechanism to facilitate the training of staff in the field, which should remain a priority of the United Nations in helping staff to avoid falling victim to violence. Contributions to the Trust Fund remain insufficient to cover the basic training needs of field-based staff, and Member States are urged to respond generously to provide the $5 million that will allow the United Nations to continue to implement the wishes of the General Assembly set out in resolution 53/87 and to better prepare staff for dangerous situations.